Legend of the Scarlet Ravine and Other Tales to Chill your Bones

Golden Pen

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Golden Pen
©2012

ISBN: 978-1-291-14130-6

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The following story is loosely based upon Washington Irving's ***Legend of Sleepy Hallow.***

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Warning: The texts in some of the stories may contain graphic scenes that may not be suitable for children.

Dedication

I dedicate this book to my husband, Alexander—with love.

Legend of the Scarlet Ravine

Between Jacksonville and Gainesville, Florida, six miles north of Keystone Heights, there lies a series of marshes and lakes. This area normally goes by the name *Mike Roess Gold Head State Park*. It is a peaceful area inhabited by fox squirrels, white-tailed deer and many water birds. On Saturday mornings, you can find people fishing here. Others

like to ride the ravine on canoes. Not far from Gold Head State Park is Little Lake Johnson and if you walk a few miles from there, a beach. There is a camping facility there with a picnic area and lakeside cabins.

The locals say that the area was once the home of a tribe of Seminole Indians who were trying to escape the brutal removal of the Seminoles by the US government. Some say that the spirits of these Indians haunt the place.

There is a legend among the neighbouring towns that say that the Government, in an attempt to wipe the Seminoles out of Florida, murdered them.

Now, I am not certain, but the locals in the area say that on Halloween they can still hear their savage war cry near the ravine where legend says that the troops shot ninety Seminole warriors to their death.

Some people claim that the waters of the ravine turned red from the blood of these savage warriors and the fish were poisoned. There is a spooky mist floating along the marshes of this area, which, on a late October morning, one can mistake for ghosts. The old folks say that the ravine is haunted; cursed by the blood of the Seminoles.

In October, the natives will tell you that the ravine shimmers like a lighthouse and the residents of the surrounding villages tormented by the cries of the Seminole warriors that lost their lives in the scarlet ravine. The predominant ghost, however, is that of the brave warrior, O'pawoka. General Brown, the squadron leader, shot the warrior in the chest during one of the battles of the Seminole Wars. The residents fear him for on Halloween night he rides through Mike Roess Gold Head State Park on his horse, wielding a tomahawk, looking for the General who shot him. It is in this remote area that our story begins.

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They never recovered the body that day. The police and State troopers scavenged the surrounding area but could not find the body. The

black and white Yamaha lay on its side at the side of the road; a trail of skid marks paved the way to where the accident happened. The bike had caught fire upon impact and there was an explosion.

The Florida highway patrol officers surmised that the body flew head first in a staggering speed into the murky waters of the ravine.

Manfred Meyers was a lively lad. His family had settled in Keystone Heights in the early 50's. He was the son of a baker and schoolteacher...an only child. They warned him of the dangers of motorcycles. However, the shiny Yamahas captivated Manfred ever since he saw Evil Kenivel jump from the Grand Canyon on his trusty chrome steed. Since then, he was fascinated with motor cycles. He begged his father to buy him one once he graduated high school, but his father, like any ordinary father, refused.

"Those bikes are dangerous, son!" his father warned him. "If you want a bike, I suggest you get a mountain bike." His father opened the brick oven to shove a loaf of bread into the oven. The bakery was full of customers waiting to buy their loaves of bread, cakes, and croissants. Manfred, frustrated and upset caught hold of his father's arm.

"I want a motorcycle, Dad...and if you don't get one for me, *I will*." With this statement, he marched out of the kitchen, walked past the eager customers and walked out the door. His father, stunned and shocked, shook his head in disappointment as his customers whispered to one another in astonishment.

Manfred took a job at the local papers delivering the *Keystone Height News*. He also worked part-time at the pizzeria. Within a year, he earned enough money to buy a used Yamaha. Pride is not the word to describe his devotion to this bike. Every weekend Manfred rose at six A.M. to wash and polish his most prized possession. Diligently he polished the chrome, applied saddle soap on the leather seat, and polished the handlebars until the sun shone down upon his black and white steed that he affectionately nicknamed, *Black beauty*.

Much to his parents' disapproval, Manfred joined a local motorcycle club, a group of about a hundred bikers throughout Bradford County, Florida, who met once a month and travelled throughout the State of Florida on their motorcycles, particularly to Mike Roess Gold Head State Park. The group acquired the nickname 'Gators on Wheels' for the tattoo of Alligators each member bore on their forearms.

His parents warned Manfred not to go. On a humid Halloween morning in 1965, Manfred rose at five O'clock to get a head start. The gang was to meet at Keystone Beach and then head towards Gold Head Branch State Park where a Halloween Party was to take place. They planned to camp there for a week after the party.

Manfred packed his rucksack the night before. He thought he had packed everything. He packed his sleeping bag, his trusty Swiss Army knife and his tent. He was certain that the girls and women of the group would bring loads of food, so he did not bother packing anything to eat. After kissing his mother and patting his father on the shoulders, he set off on *Black Beauty* at eight O'clock.

A few minutes after he set off, the phone rang. His mother picked up the phone. It was Max Johnson, one of her son's friends from Gators on Wheels. Max told Manfred's mother that the gang cancelled the trip due to inclement weather. Had he phoned five minutes earlier, Manfred would not have set out towards the beach.

Manfred arrived at Keystone Beach around nine O'clock. The beach was deserted, save for a few beach bums who walked their dogs along the beach. He waited impatiently for the group to arrive.

"Oh, man," exclaimed Manfred, "I forgot my cell phone!" It was eleven O'clock when he could wait no longer. He got on his bike. He was angry.

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He sped through the highway like a thoroughbred. *Was this a cruel Halloween joke*? He wondered as he sped past signs and villages. The wind slapped his face and combed through his hair.

He was so angry that he did not feel it. *How dare they play a Halloween joke on me*? *Well, they can go screw themselves*, he murmured to himself. Up above in the horizon, a few buzzards flew.

The air whipped through his sides, burning his cheeks and giving him chilblains. He was almost at Gold Head Branch State Park by now. He was about to turn right when he thought he heard something behind him.

It was a high pitch sound, much like a cry. He looked in his side view mirror but all he could see was clear open highway and trees. The cry echoed and penetrated his ears, almost perforating his eardrums.

Manfred thought he was imagining things, but when he looked in his side view mirror again, he thought he saw a white horse chasing him. Riding on the horse's back was an Indian brave. The brave was brown-skinned and wore a black Mohawk. The brave wielded a tomahawk, throwing it towards Manfred.

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Manfred sped at 190 miles per hours down the highway, his pursuer on his tail. The Tomahawk sped and caught the back of Manfred's neck. His body went flying off the bike, landing in the ravine. Black Beauty skidded off the open road, catching fire before exploding.

It was early evening when a motorist caught site of the burning bike, alerting the police. The troopers came and extinguished the fire. They discovered Manfred's wallet by a nearby bush. From his credentials, they found his address.

"Mr and Mrs Meyers," said Officer Malhound when he approached the residence. Mr and Mrs Meyers exchanged curious glances and stared back at the officer.

"I regret to inform you that your son, Manfred, has had a terrible accident."

Manfred's mother, unable to take in this horrible news collapsed. Her husband gently carried her, sat her down on the sofa, and went to the bathroom for some smelling salts. The officer held the smelling salts against her nostrils. When she came to, she was shaking like a leaf.

How many times had she warned her son of the dangers of motorcycles? Why did this have to happen to her only son? Officer Malhound sat adjacent to Mr and Mrs Meyers in their tiny living room.

"We haven't found a body, yet, I'm afraid, but our troopers and the Florida Highway Patrol are doing all they can to find it." He told the grieving couple.

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George Gallenger funeral home was full to capacity that cold November morning. Everyone in the village came to pay their respects to the young man they once knew as the baker's son. All members of the Alligator on Wheels Club came to pay their respects to their newest member. The empty casket lay in the middle of Saint William Catholic Church; the light brown pine casket bedecked with a white mantle, an old family heirloom belonging to the deceased's great-grand mother, bore a crown of white lilies. Mrs Meyer's wails cut the sombre atmosphere.

Father Harris made the sign of the cross over the casket and signalled the pallbearers to remove the casket as it made its final journey towards Keystone Heights Cemetery.

A procession of black cars, followed by the members of Manfred's motorcycle club, all with black bunting on the handlebars and flickering taillights, marched towards the cemetery following the hearth.

It was a rainy morning on Tuesday, 2nd November—All Soul's Day. The earth was moist and damp, and an odour of rotten soilage rose from amongst the graves. The mourners sighed as the pallbearers carried the empty casket towards the spot and waited for Father Harris to commence the funeral service. Up ahead, behind a hawthorn tree, someone thought he saw a black figure walking amongst the tombstones and resting behind a sycamore tree. It stared at the mourners from behind its hiding space.

Mrs Meyers swooned and fainted in the middle of the ceremony. Concerned members of the funeral party called an ambulance. Finally, they lowered the remains of Manfred Meyers to the ground.

As the mourners dispersed to get back on with their own routines and meagre lifestyles, a dark figure tarried behind. Standing over Manfred's grave, it paused and stared at the gravesite for the space of half an hour.

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Halloween 1966

Simon 'Skin head' Trevor road like the wind through Mike Roess State Park, his black shoulder-length hair flapping behind him. They called him 'skin head' because of the bald spot on top of his head, surrounded by tufts of black shoulder length hair. There was hardly any traffic at this time of day. It was six O'clock in the morning. He was in sort of a hurry. He was on his way to his girlfriend's house to meet her parents.

He was dressed in a black T- shirt with the words, 'Born to ride' emblazoned on the front—not very impressive attire to wear when one meets the potential in-laws, but he had no other suitable attire. He was not one who regularly did his laundry. Besides, what difference did his clothes make when it was his intention of taking care of their daughter till death do them part? Simon Trevor was not a big fan of first impressions.

He bought his girl a 1-karat diamond ring a month ago from Luria's Jewellery store in Tallahassee. It cost him two grand. It took him a year's salary to earn that amount. How many cars did he have to fix at the garage to buy that ring? Yet, Sally was worth it. Heck, she was his girlfriend for nearly a decade. She was devoted to him—totally.

Sally was getting a bit impatient lately. How many twenty-seven – year old brides were there in Florida? In theory, girls as young as seventeen were already having their third or fourth baby and wearing a 2-karat diamond on their fingers.

Simon owed Sally a ring. He was also getting a bit too old to play the singles game...not that he was complaining...but he felt that it was time to take it easy. It was time to find himself a wife and live like a king in his own little castle; being pampered and waited on head to toe by his wife. Every man deserves that.

The weather was nice this time of year. It was not as hot as it gets in mid August. The weatherman said today would be in the high 60's. The weatherman predicted no rain...just a sunny day in the mid to high 60's. Simon tightened his grip on the handlebars as he waited for the lights to turn green.

Sally's parents lived in a pink house on West Walker Drive. Simon parked his Harley Davidson in front of their drive, shut the engine off, removed his helmet and walked up to the Johnsons' front porch. Immediately, Cocoa, the family dog, jumped up at him from the Johnsons' backyard. For a little dog, he barked like a Great Dane.

Simon patted the little dog on the head. The dog barked like crazy at Simon. The front door opened and out came Sally.

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"There you are, Love!" said Sally who greeted her fiancé whilst holding a tea towel and a wooden spoon.

"Did you have a hard time finding the place?" she asked, licking chocolate off the spoon.

"No, Love. The place was easy to find. Is this a good parking space, Love? I can always move the Harley if I am in someone's way." Simon asked his girlfriend.

"Yeah, your bike is safe there. Nobody's going to touch it." Sally replied. A wonderful aroma came from inside the threshold. Simon could smell roast chicken and garlic.

"Come on in, Love. Mum and Dad will be delighted to meet you." said Sally, inviting her boyfriend in.

Simon walked past the foyer, decorated with paper ghosts, witches, goblins and plenty of orange and black balloons. A huge ceramic pumpkin sat in the middle of a Mahogany side table filled to the brim with Clark Bars, bite-size bags of M&M's, and caramels. The foyer led to the living room where Sally's father sat reading the newspaper. Mr Johnson was dressed in a white shirt and black trousers, his hair combed neatly back, parted on the side. He was a tall man with dark prominent facial features. He looked up as his daughter walked in with her fiancé.

"Dad, this is Simon, my Fiancé." Sally introduced Simon to her father. Her father rose from the couch and shook Simon's hand.

"So you're the fellow who stole my little girl's heart?" he teased, giving Simon the once over. Simon could tell from the expression on the man's face that he was not impressed with him.

"I'm Simon Trevor, Sir." Simon shook the man's hand with a firm grip. Sally's Dad noticed the Alligator tattoo on his forearm.

"Mr Trevor, won't you please sit down." Sally's father asked his guest. Simon took a seat on the beige upholstered sofa opposite Sally's father. There was a long silence before Sally made her way into the kitchen to get Simon something to drink. Sally's Dad broke the silence.

"I'm Matthew Johnson, Mr Trevor. You can call me Matt, if you like." Sally's father said. Simon was admiring a photograph of Mr Johnson in his uniform just as Mr Johnson spoke.

"Thank you, Sir," said Simon, "Is this you in the picture, Matt?" Simon asked. Mr Johnson lit a cigar. He glanced at Simon and smiled at him.

"Yes, that handsome guy in the picture is me in my uniform." Matthew Johnson answered. Sally returned with a cup of lemonade.

Simon took a sip of the cold drink and thanked his fiancée.

"Are you a cop, Sir?" asked Simon. He took another sip of lemonade. Sally sat next to her father for a minute or two. She answered Simon's question.

"Yes, Dad is a State trooper." Sally replied patting her father's shoulders.

"He's a wonderful officer." Mr Johnson sat there with a modest look on his face.

"That's interesting, Mr Johnson—Matt. Sally's already told me all about you, Sir." Simon said, taking another sip of lemonade. The doorbell rang just then and Sally went to answer it. A group of witches and zombies stood on the threshold with round hallow plastic pumpkins. Sally pretended to be startled.

"Trick-Or-Treat!" they chanted in unison. Sally grabbed a handful of candies and filled their pumpkins with the loot. A chorus of 'thank you' pelted her.

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Back inside, Matthew was interrogating Simon. Simon sat back, sipping lemonade as Matthew sat there like a drill sergeant with a smirk on his face as he took another puff of his Cohiba.

“Sally was saying you are a mechanic, Mr Trevor?” Matthew Johnson asked looking at Simon’s Born to Ride T-shirt. He sank back in the sofa waiting for Simon’s answer.

“Yes, Sir, Mr Johnson, I work at Al’s garage.” Simon replied. “It’s a dirty job, but an honest living.” His drink almost empty, he placed the empty glass on the coaster. Simon could feel Matthew’s gaze pierce through him like a laser.

“You plan on being a mechanic all your life, Mr Trevor?” Matthew asked, waiting for Simon to screw up. From the kitchen came the voice of his wife.

“Dinner is served.” Mrs Johnson announced. Simon turned to answer Sally’s Dad.

“Well, yes, Sir, as a matter of fact, I am. I do not see anything wrong with my choice of profession. It is an honest living. It is in my genes. My father is a mechanic as well as my uncle and grandfather. They taught me all the tricks of the trade.”

“That’s very impressive, Mr Trevor. I can tell that you work with your hands. Tell me, son, how will you manage to support my daughter on your wages?” He looked at Simon with curious beady eyes.

Simon was starting to feel uncomfortable. Mr Johnson was now getting personal. He was about to answer when Mrs Johnson popped in. She was a small blond woman with a bouffant hairdo. Standing 5 feet 6 inches tall, she looked very much like his Sally, only a tad older.

“Hello, you must be Simon. Sally has told me all about you.” Mrs Johnson said. “Matt, dear, it’s dinner time. Please help me in the kitchen.” Matt rose to help his wife.

“Simon, won’t you excuse us for a moment while we get dinner on the table. Do make yourself comfortable.” Mrs Johnson said.

“Thank you, Mrs Johnson,” Simon said. “You are most kind. He sat on the sofa and looked at Sally who just turned on the television.

“You can call me Helen,” Mrs Johnson said before retrieving to the kitchen to get the dishes out. “Sally, dear, can you set the table for me.” She asked her daughter. Sally rose and began to set the dinner table.

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Simon sat opposite Matthew. Sally sat next to Simon and Mrs Johnson sat next to her husband. Simon looked down upon his starter—a crisp Caesar salad swimming in a sea of Caesar dressing, little islands of croutons floated on a bed of lettuce. Simon picked his main fork, getting curious stares from Matthew and his fiancé. Sally lifted her salad fork and signalled Simon to change forks. Simon caught on and excused himself, picking up the salad fork.

“So, Simon,” Matthew said between bites, “Is that a tattoo of an alligator I see on your forearm?”

Simon looked at the alligator wiggling about as he jerked his arms to pierce the salad greens.

“Yes, Mr Johnson. This here is my initiation tattoo.” Simon replied. Matthew stopped eating for a moment and stared at his dinner guest.

Was Simon a part of some gang, Matthew thought. *No way was his daughter going to marry a member of a gang. Over his dead body would he allow his precious little girl to have anything to do with a member of a gang; it would be a cold day in hell the day his daughter was seduced by a crack head*.

“What kind of initiation are you talking about, Mr Trevor?” Matthew asked, almost interrogating the man. Sally collected each salad plate and stacked them in a pile.

“Now, Dad...don’t make our guest feel intimidated; enough with the twenty questions.” Simon took a sip of water before he answered.

“I belong to the Alligator Motorcycle Club, Sir. We are nicknamed ‘Gators on Wheels’. We are an honorary club who meet at Weekends. The Club is part of the Motorcycle Association.” Simon explained. “I’m sure you’ve heard of us.”

Matthew cringed as he kept his eye on his future son-in-law. Sally and her mother went into the kitchen to fetch the soup, leaving the men alone to get to know each other.

“Of course I heard of them...a bunch of grown men taking control of the highway on the Devil’s steed. You people think you own the highway. Well let me tell you something—Every week it’s people like me who has to haul his ass out and peel guys like you and their ‘trusty’ steed off the highway. There ought to be laws against motorcycles.” Matthew said leaving Simon gobsmacked.

Before Simon had a chance to speak, the women returned. Sally carried a stack of soup bowls while Mrs Johnson carried a large, white, Wedgewood soup tureen.

“Soups on,” Sally said. “Who wants a nice hearty bowl of Mom’s pumpkin soup?”

Mrs Johnson set the soup tureen in the centre of the table and stood with her ladle, filling bowls with the pumpkin soup. “Enjoy everyone.

There's plenty more for seconds." Mrs Johnson said before sitting down to enjoy her soup.

The doorbell rang and startled all of them. Sally rose to open the door. Perhaps it was more withes and goblins asking for candies. Sally excused herself, walked to the foyer, and picked up her ceramic pumpkin. She opened the front door to hand out the last of the Halloween loot but there was no one there.

"Hello?" yelled Sally. "Is anybody there?" She stepped out onto the porch, looked left and right but there was no one in sight. The streets looked deserted at seven O'clock. A strong breeze made all the wind chimes on West Walker Street dance.

"It must be the ghosts, then." Sally said as she turned towards the house. Behind the palm trees, a dark shadow danced across the lawn.

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"Who was it, pumpkin?" asked her father. Sally put the ceramic pumpkin down and joined her parents and fiancé in the dining room.

"There was no one at the door. Someone must have pulled a prank." Sally said, helping herself to some mashed potatoes.

"Damn Halloween pranksters!" yelled Matthew. "I hate this season!"

"Now, Matthew, behave. We have a guest in the house." Helen chided.

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Mrs Johnson lit the Jack-O-Lantern. The four of them sat in the living room stuffed. Simon enjoyed the Halloween meal. He could not eat another bite. Mrs Johnson outdid herself with her culinary skills.

The Monster Meatloaf, in the shape of a dead man with ketchup smeared all over him and a plastic knife plunged through the man's heart was truly a conversational piece. Simon had never seen anything like it.

The grinning Jack-O-lantern glimmered, lighting the room as Mrs Johnson asked Sally to help her bring out the dessert and coffee. Matthew grinned at Simon who sat in the easy chair looking at the television set. They were showing *The Alligator People, one of those B horror movies.* Matthew lit up another cigar and sat back, blowing smoke on the sofa.

"Did you enjoy the meal, Mr Trevor?" asked Matthew. He leaned forward slightly, a ring of smoke encircled over his head and the smoke bellowed towards Simon.

"I did so very much enjoyed dinner, Sir. Thank you very much for a lovely dinner." Simon replied, politely– Some how he felt a bit awkward sitting there in front of his future father-in-law.

There was something peculiar about the man. He could not put a finger on it, but there was certainly something strange about him aside from the typical father-in-law/son-in-law warfare.

Somehow Simon felt that Mr Johnson had something personal against him—some sort of vendetta that he could not quite lay a finger on. Nevertheless, that is an odd thought.

Until today, Mr Johnson had never met Simon before. Oh, sure, Sally had spoken about him on several occasions and had shown them her engagement ring, but not until formally invited to dinner tonight had Mr Johnson laid eyes on the man.

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Sally and Mrs Johnson returned to the living room with a pumpkin pie, a stack of dessert dishes, utensils and a carafe. Mrs Johnson set the Pumpkin pie near the Jack-O-Lantern and cut each of them a portion. Sally sat next to Simon on the love seat. She coerced Simon to sit next to her while they all had dessert. Mrs Johnson stood to serve the coffee. Simon noticed she was wearing an orange apron with pumpkins and autumnal leaves.

"So, Simon, are you from around here?" asked Mrs Johnson, handing Simon a cup and saucer. Simon accepted the coffee and pie and set the dish and coffee down on the edge of the coffee table.

"I'm from Gainesville, Mrs Johnson...not too far from here. " Simon replied. Mrs Johnson joined her husband on the couch and took a sip of her coffee.

"That's interesting, Simon. Were you born there or did your family relocate there?" asked Mrs Johnson. Simon was about to take a bite of pumpkin pie when Mrs Johnson addressed him.

"I was born in Dade, County, Mrs Johnson. My father relocated to Gainesville in the 50's." Simon replied. Taking a bite of pumpkin pie, he winked at Sally. Matthew took another puff of his cigar and sat there pondering in silence.

“Gainesville is a flourishing town,” said Matthew. “Most of my relatives come from there.” Matthew lifted his cup and took a sip of coffee. “Yes, my great-granddaddy, Earl T. Johnson lived on Pleasant Street.”

Simon turned towards Sally. “You never told me this, Love.” said Simon. Sally put down her coffee cup. She glanced at her father and then back towards Simon.

“I never knew this myself, Darling. Dad never mentioned this to me before.”

A silence fell among them and all four sat in the living room basking in the warmth and glow of the Jack-O-Lantern. It was getting dark outside, almost ten O’clock. None of them spoke, but sat admiring the grinning Jack-O-lantern and contemplating about the season.

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“I love this time of year,” said Simon, breaking the silence. “It’s such a wonderfully warm and lovely season. The autumn is bursting with lovely russet colours and the gourds add a bit of colour and warmth to this season.”

“I agree,” said Sally, “I love the different colours of the leaves this time of year. I always love Halloween. It’s the time of the year when you can be anything you want to be other than your boring self.”

Matthew took a bite of his pumpkin pie. “The best part of the season is the ghost tales. I can remember the stories my grandmother, Hialanah told me when I was growing up. My grandmother was half-Indian, you see. She used to tell me tales about the Seminole Wars that would make the hairs

on the back of my neck stand on its own. One story in particular made me shiver late on Halloween night. It was the story of the Scarlet Lake."

This made Sally break in Goosebumps. "What sort of story is that, Dad?" asked Sally. She cuddled up to Simon with her ears inclined. Matthew leaned forward on the couch.

"This is an old Indian legend that my grandmother told me years and years ago. Grandmother Hialanah grew up in Gainesville village.

She heard the story from her grandfather, a Seminole warrior who fought in the Seminole Wars in the 1800's. The story goes that late in the autumn of 1819; a tribe of Seminole Warriors were under attack by soldiers of the US government who wanted them out.

The soldiers burned down huts and villages, rounded the women and children as prisoners and hunted the braves.

A hundred Seminole warriors hid in the marches of what we call today as *Mike Roess Gold Head State Park*. It was here that a great battle took place. The US troops, under the leadership of Colonel Gains, massacred eighty Seminole warriors. Some of the warriors shot clean by a single gunshot; parts of their bodies flew all over the place; they attacked the other savages with machetes; the warriors that survived fled south; the bodies of the dead warriors, thrown in the ravine. They say the waters were tainted red that day from the blood of the braves. There are legends that say the fish died as a result of the poisoned blood of those Seminole warriors."

Sally took hold of Simon's hand. This story was a bit too scary. Simon, who lost a friend a year ago, in that area, felt a chill. Nevertheless, Matthew continued with the story.

"One of the warriors, O'pawoka, took revenge of the soldiers. O'pawoka followed the men on horseback on their way towards the garrison. O'pawoka vowed revenge for the bloodshed of his tribesmen. Waving a tomahawk in mid air, O'pawoka took down two of the triumphant soldiers as the others marched on horseback towards the garrison."

"OK, Matthew, that's enough stories for one night." Mrs Johnson said to her husband. "I think it's time I better make some more coffee." Her husband told her to relax.

He needed to continue.

"Swiftly, O'pawoka dismounted the horse and took the bodies of the two dead soldiers into the woods, decapitating and scalping them, finally disposing the bodies in a nearby river. By and by, the other men wondered what happened to their two men and a search party began to investigate the area. The leader of the brigade, Jacob Brown, found the bodies floating in the scarlet river. The heads were hoisted up on a pole like prizes."

"Dad, you're scaring us! Please stop! Simon has to leave soon. He'll be heading towards that direction." Sally interrupted her father. Matthew looked at her fiancé.

"You're not frightened of a little ghost tale, Mr Trevor, are you?" asked Matthew. "After all, it's just a story my grandmother used to tell me on Halloween." He lit another cigar and stared at Simon.

"I guess I'm alright, Mr Johnson. No, I am not afraid. It is just a spooky tale. It is just that my friend, Manfred Meyers had an accident in

that area. The cops never recovered the body. The cops assumed by their report that the body hurled into the ravine. I think this is rather spooky after listening to your story."

Matthew's eyes twinkled. "Oh yes, I heard about your friend, Mr Trevor. It was a sad tale, indeed. Your friend drove a Yamaha, didn't he?" asked Sally's father. Simon nodded.

Mrs Johnson broke the silence. "Excuse, me, everybody, I am going to get the family album. Times like these call for old family photos." Matthew rolled his eyes. Sally turned her nose up.

"Oh, Mom, do not bore Simon with those ancient relics. I'm sure Simon doesn't want to browse through scrolls of historical documents."

Simon laughed. Addressing Mrs Johnson he said, "Of course I will. I do not mind leafing through old family photographs, Mrs Johnson. Bring them out."

"Darling, I'm in the middle of a story," Interrupted her husband. "So please sit down. We can all look at the photos later." His wife rolled her eyes as she sank back down on the sofa. Matthew continued his horrific tale.

"Now, where were we? Oh yes, the leader of the brigade found the two murdered soldiers in the scarlet ravine, their heads hoisted up on a pole. Terrified, the leader ran for the others, mounted on his horse. O'pawoka, along with eight other fellow warriors who had fled the battle of the scarlet ravine, on horseback, followed the soldiers in an up-rise. With a

mighty war cry, the braves forged though the village throwing arrows at the soldiers and savagely beating women, children and civilians. The soldiers fought back with muskets and machetes."

"Did they kill the Indians, Dad?" Sally asked. Simon was listening with trepidation to this tale, all the while thinking about how he was soon to travel through this very spot. The clock on the wall indicated it was eleven O'clock. Matthew lit another cigar and continued with his story.

"O'pawoka rode his steed in pursuit of the squadron leader, Jacob Brown, chasing him through the village and back towards the marshes where a few hours earlier his brothers were murdered. A misty haze floated through the marches. The squadron leader could hear his enemy approaching."

Mrs Johnson, Sally and Simon let out a yell as the light from the Jack-O-lantern flickered and went out. Sally relit the Jack-O-Lantern then Mr Johnson continued his grisly tale...

"The moonlight reflected upon the scarlet waters of the ravine, giving it a florescent sheen. Just then, Brown thought he heard something splashing in the water.

Frightened, Brown slowly took a few steps backwards, but as he moved his foot one-step further, he bumped into O'pawoka. O'pawoka plunged his Tomahawk into Brown's head. The squadron leader fell back towards the earth as blood oozed down his scalp.

Mrs Johnson, appalled by all this ghost story, asked her husband to stop. It was getting quite late and Simon had to get home soon. "Matthew, for heaven's sakes, it's nearly midnight. Can you stop it with the ghost stories for now? I think we've all had enough Halloween for one evening."

Matthew took another puff of his cigar.

“I must finish the story, Helen,” he said before continuing his tale. They all sat back as Matthew continued his story.

“Just as O’pawoka was about to finish General Brown with his Tomahawk, General Brown shot O’pawoka with his musket through the heart. O’pawoka fell backwards unto the misty marshes now, some say, that O’pawoka still haunts the marshes. Every Halloween he rides his horse through the misty marches and the SR21 in search of blood; they say that he patrols the area between Gainesville and Keystone Heights in pursuit of those who murdered his tribesmen. Legend says that he throws his Tomahawk at his enemies, knocking them off their steeds before scalping them.”

The phone rang causing Matthew’s audience to jump off the edge of their seats. Matthew rose to answer it. A few minutes later, he returned to the living room. His wife, daughter and Simon were just catching their breath and recovering from their fright as Matthew put on his helmet.

“Darn kids! I have to go to work now, Helen. Some kid just had an accident on the SR 21. The vehicle overturned. The kid hit the railing as the car skidded off the road. “

Matthew shook Simon’s hand. “Mr Trevor, it’s been a pleasure meeting you. Can I escort you off the estate?”

Simon rose to his feet, put on his leather jacket and took out the keys to the motor cycle. The keys were attached to a jackrabbit’s foot key ring—

a lucky charm he once was given by one of his ex-girlfriends when he first bought the Harley Davidson.

"That's mighty fine of you, Mr Johnson." Simon said. Matthew nodded in acknowledgement, and then turned towards his wife. Helen was yawning. It was a long night.

The Jack-O-Lantern flickered, casting shadows on the wall. Simon glanced upon the shadows as his imagination twirled in rhythm with the flickering shadows, which to him, resembled unsettled spirits.

"Don't wait up for me, Helen," said her husband as he was opening the door. "I have a feeling that this will be a long winded night." He turned and walked out the door to move his car. Simon stood in the porch with Sally. The stars flickered in the sky like the Jack-O-Lantern's candle. Simon turned to face his fiancé.

"Goodnight, Darling," Simon whispered. "It's been such a lovely evening. You get a goodnight's sleep."

"Goodnight, Simon. Thank you for coming. I'm sorry Dad scared you with his ghost story." Sally said.

"I'm not spooked, pumpkin. I am not one for ghost tales. It was just that my friend, Manfred recently died in that area a year ago. They never recovered his body."

“That is spooky, Love,” Sally said, “I can’t imagine what has happen to the body. Why, it gives me the creeps!”

“You go inside, Darling. It is getting cold. I’ll phone you first thing in the morning.”

Their lips met in a long sweet kiss as the stars continued to flicker. The world stood still as if they were under enchantment. Matthew broke the spell. He beeped his horn, signalling to Simon to move his motorcycle out of the driveway.

Simon bid Sally goodnight a final time before putting on his helmet. The moon shone a bright blood-orange red. The streets were deserted and a deathly silence descended upon the little town.

Simon started the Harley Davidson, the sound of the engine cut through the deathly silence of midnight like a knife. Matthew drove his patrol car out of his driveway and waved to his daughter who stood at the doorway waving back to her father and her fiancé.

Matthew escorted Simon to the outskirts of the town. Simon gave Matthew a nod, accelerated the engine and drove into the night. There was hardly any traffic at this time of night. All the revellers would be either home examining their loot, at a masquerade party or asleep at this time of night.

Simon followed the main road, Florida South road 21. He prayed that he would be home by two in the morning. The dinner date had been a disaster. Sally and her mother did an outstanding job providing a

wonderfully cooked meal. Sally's Dad, on the other hand, was nothing but rude to him all evening.

He detected a sense of animosity betwixt them. The Harley sped forward, one with the rode. It would not be long now until he was safe at home unlocking the front door and settling in for a nice long nap.

Behind him, Simon could hear nothing but wind and the revving of his engine. He passed several palm trees and soon he was approaching Gold Head State Park. It was pitch black. The only light came from his headlights, which illuminated the path ahead.

Out in the distance he saw a motorbike with its lights at full blast.

"Turn off your beam, you idiot," yelled Simon, "You're blinding me!" It was a black Yamaha, but Simon could not see the driver. He was dressed all in black and was wearing a black helmet, covering his face. The Yamaha flew past him.

"Idiot!" Simon yelled. Simon drove on, shaking his head as he put pedal to the metal. It is not long now, Simon. You will be home soon, buddy**,** he thought to himself.

Simon thought he saw something fly by in the corner of his eye...it was a figure; but he could not make it out. A shrill piercing cry broke out and Simon was startled. *What the heck was that?*, he asked himself. He heard it again. The cry was coming from behind. He looked in his side mirror but saw no one. Then he heard a trotting noise, like the noise of a horse. What was a horse doing on the SR 21?

Simon sped ahead, hoping to lose whoever it was behind him. The phantom gained speed, following Simon, hot in pursuit. The motorcycle sped at 160 mph, but still his pursuer caught up with him. Simon looked in his side mirror, saw a blinding light, and heard the sound of another motorbike behind him. It was the mysterious driver again. It was now on Simon's tail.

"Leave me alone, you demons!" yelled Simon. Simon's Harley Davidson raced at 180 mph. His pursuers followed close behind.

Simon cut through Gold Head Park in hopes of losing his pursuers. However, the motorbike and the phantom rider followed him into the park. Simon rode through a thicket in the middle of the park, near the ravine. A scarlet mantle shimmered over the ravine, as a blanket of thick mist rose over the marshes.

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Looking behind him, he could see the blinding light. The light hurt his eyes and he turned around, accelerating his bike. The trotting noise came closer, closer. Simon sped on into the night. From the side mirror, he saw the flying tomahawk. It flew in his direction. Simon accelerated his bike even more, but as he turned to face the open road, the bike hit a boulder. The last thing Simon felt was the Tomahawk plunging deep into the back of his skull and the splash of water.

A Park ranger found the over- turned Harley the following morning near a clearing with its wheels turning; the keys, attached to a lucky rabbit's foot key ring, were still in the ignition.

"Crazy kids," the ranger spat under his breath, "Don't they know the dangers of motor bikes?" The Florida State troopers investigating the scene

found nothing but a black helmet, floating in the ravine.

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Sally Johnson waited three years for her fiancé to phone. Distraught, she did not know what to think. Did her fiancé think twice about their engagement and run off? No one knew for certain what became of Simon Trevor.

The village gossips whispered tales, about how Simon Trevor was taken by the spirits of the Scarlet Ravine on Halloween— victim of O'pawoka. Others say that he already had a wife and kid in Savannah, Georgia and that his wife found out about his engagement to Sally Johnson and in a fit of jealousy killed him, decapitating his body into so many pieces, burying them in strategic spots along the park. What is certain, though, is that Sally Johnson became a spinster. She never married, but still to this day, she waits up by the phone for her fiancé to phone her as she looks down upon her engagement ring still sparkling bright on her bony, wrinkled finger.

Snow Bunnies in Hell

Herman Wilding stood two miles away from the Gate waiting his turn. The queue spiralled into a mile long circle. Herman looked down at his ticket. A certain chill ran up his soul. His number was 666. Herman shuddered and shivered. He was freezing without his jacket. “Hey, buddy, something wrong?” asked the man behind him. Herman turned around to find a man with a tattoo of a pink bunny on his left arm.

“Nothing wrong, friend, just curious and cold. Take a look at my ticket.” He flashed the man his ticket. The man laughed and grabbed the ticket. “That is funny, mate.” He turned the ticket upside down.

“Maybe you were reading it the wrong way, in which case, you should be standing 333 places behind me.” Herman scratched his head and looked at his ticket again. Now it read 999.

“Well, fancy that!” said Herman. He slowly made his way 333 places behind the man with the pink bunny tattoo. The sun was getting brighter and the queue was not getting any shorter.

Finally, it was Herman’s turn to walk up to the Gate. He smiled at the man behind the desk. Herman flashed his ticket in the man’s face. “Hello!” said the Porter.

“Passport, please.” asked the Porter. Herman fumbled through his pockets and took out a rather old and raggedy passport. The pages were torn and yellow with age. He handed this to the Porter.

“Interesting,” said the Porter. “You have led a very long and sinful life, my friend.” Herman looked down at his feet, unable to look at the Porter in the eye.

“It says here that you were a gambling man—tsk, tsk. Oh, and you are a fighting man, too. You were involved in several rumbles which ended with blood and gore.”

The Porter flipped a switch and the large screen in the Square behind the Gate flashed images of Herman's sinful life for everyone to see. Herman looked in horror as every scene flashed images of his sinful deeds and words. He heard the crowd behind him gasp in horror.

"Please, please, Sir, turn it off! Turn it off!" said Herman in shock and embarrassment.

"So, you are embarrassed by your deeds?" asked the Porter. "That's good. Unfortunately, that is not enough to win you a ticket inside the Gate. I'm afraid it is the end of the road for you, my friend." The Porter stamped Herman's passport with a great big red stamp that said, "Entrance denied".

Herman looked at the Porter. "But, where will I go, Sir?" he asked.

"I am afraid, Herman, it's down the basement with you!" The Porter flipped a switch and the last thing that Herman said was "Noooooooo!" before falling down into an unfathomable pit.

The Porter looked up from his desk, turned to face the crowd and said to himself, "This is the part of my job I love the most!"

Herman found himself in a vast wilderness. He looked all about, but all he could see was a white cold wilderness. Taking a few breaths, he thought he saw a phantom before him. Oh, wait a moment... it was his breath. "Where in tarnations am I?" he asked himself. Suddenly, he saw something swish by him. He adjusted his glasses.

As he stood up to compose himself, zoooooom...another thing passed by in rapid speed. "What the hell?" he said. He was horrified to see two pink bunnies on skis zoom past him. Herman fell on his backside in a blanket of deep snow. "Where the hell am I?" asked Herman.

"Hell indeed is where you are!" said a husky but familiar voice in front of him. Herman tried to stand to face his adversary, but fell back down the frigid snow. The man held out his hand to help Herman up. Herman noticed that his fingers were gnarled, sporting black fingernails. He then noticed the pink bunny tattoo on the man's left arm.

“Excuse me, but weren’t you standing behind me just a little while ago?” asked Herman. The man laughed quite haughtily at Herman. Herman recognized him in an instant. What was this man playing at? What type of a place was this? Why was he even having this conversation?

“You’re very observant, friend,” said the man with the pink bunny tattoo. “I believe we are going to be friends.” He shook Herman’s hand with a rather tight grip. “I am Nick. I run the ski resort here. Welcome to Hell Ski Lodge.”

“Hell Ski Lodge?” asked Herman. “Is this what this asylum is called?” He tried to brush the snow off, but the snow seemed to be stuck on him. “It’s freezing here. Is there a warm place where we can sit and talk and maybe have a hot drink?” asked Herman.

“Ha, don’t make me, laugh! There are no warm places here. You are in the middle of hell—the coldest place on earth! You might as well make the most of it, because you are going to call this place home for the rest of your life.”

Herman howled like a jackal in distress. His nose twitched suddenly and his ears grew long. He wiggled about and felt a cottontail grow behind him. His two front teeth grew six inches long and his hind legs thumped nervously against the snow. “What’s happening?” he asked Nick. Nick just laughed and handed him some skis and a pink jacket.

In the distance, Herman could see miles and miles of snow- covered mountains and billions of pink bunnies in pink snowsuits dashing by. They laughed and giggled as they skied up and down the snowy mountain peaks of Ghana Nova, their googly eyes dancing in sheer insanity. As they zoomed by, they chanted,

‘Pink snow bunnies will ski in hell, hurrah,

Pink bunnies ski with great chutzpah.

Up and down Mount Ghana Nova

Pink snow bunnies will ski in Hell, Viola!’

Siege of Calliope

Harry Rodgers hunched over his notebook. Globs of sweat, like rancid rain, mingled with globs of metallic ink. His hands shook like those of an addict who has just gone into rehab and was experiencing the first hard-core taste of withdrawal. The lantern on his desk illuminated his work, like the penetrating light bulb that flashed in a suspect's eyes while under interrogation for a crime. Harry squinted as his hand quivered, hovering over the page.

Oh, this is useless, thought Harry; *I'll never make the deadline."*

Harry Rodgers, a prolific writer of ***Adelle***— a novel he has been working on for the past five years— had been recently published by Sampson & Son. It was a huge success.

The novel sold over a million copies and was on the New York Times Best Seller List for five consecutive weeks.

The novel, about an African American woman growing up in the South during the heat of the American Civil War, who had an affair with a white Confederate soldier, was an instant best-seller. Adelle's lover, Henry Smyth, was currently being court marshalled for falling in love with a slave and pursuing Adelle. ***Adelle*** triggered international and interracial phenomena. He signed a contract with Sampson & Sons to write a sequel to his best-selling novel. Sampson & Sons paid Harry a staggering quarter of a million dollars in advance money in exchange for Harry's upcoming book, ***A Woman of Class.*** Harry remembered the joys of writing his novel, ***Adelle***. He recalled every aspect of the writing process and the incredible delight he felt when he first saw his name blazoned across the cover.

Whilst writing ***Adelle***, Harry's fingers flew across the page as he dotted each 'I' and crossed each 'T'. Like a sanctimonious scholar, he religiously poured his soul into writing this novel.

Night by night he'd sit on his favourite chair as his muse dictated words into his ears which he, Harry Rodgers, author extraordinaire, wrote down fervently, like some pious zealot, from the deluge of words that poured throughout his soul like a flood from his favourite muse. He finished ***Adelle*** in eight months.

When he finished the novel, he poured a bottle of chardonnay into a goblet and drank in celebration, toasting to the success of his first novel. His heart beat within him like a ravishing bird flapping its wings wildly within its cage. He glanced at the finished novel with a gluttonous hunger for success and fame. His first thought was the small fortune in royalties that this epic would accrue. Yet, the novel was yet sitting on his desk, gleaming and looking up at him...but quite...unpublished.

Next morning he walked over to the ***A perfect Print*** and had the printer print three copies of his beloved manuscript. Don Simon, the printer looked up from the enormous machine that whirred and applied ink that would produce three replicas of his work.

"Is this your work, Mr Rodgers?" Harry squinted at the Don Simon and nodded greedily. "Yes, this is my manuscript. I laboured feverishly over it. I wish to have it published as soon as possible." he said to the lanky fellow behind the roaring machine.

"Good luck, Signore!" Don Simon said with a smile on his face.

Hmmm, he thought to himself, *who can be crazy enough to publish this novel?* There were dozens of publishers in town who published women sagas. Two, in particular, were big publishing houses whose criteria for submission were quite harsh. He read about the astounding amount of unsolicited material from aspiring authors like himself who submitted their manuscripts in hopes of a publishing deal, only to be heartbroken when the rejection notice came knocking at their door.

It isn't fair, thought Harry, *I've worked my fingers to the bone, burning the midnight hour over this novel to have some snobbish book seller turn its nose to it.* He thumbed through the list of publishing houses.

He took a gulp of wine, and then picked three publishing houses on the list to send the manuscript.

His heart continued beating as he placed each copy of his beloved ***Adelle*** into each manila envelope. Three long weeks flew by and Harry waited impatiently for the response from the publishing houses...but none came. He thought about phoning them to find out the outcome of his manuscript, but had second thoughts. He did not want to sound desperate either. Weeks turned into months and still he waited for a reply but there was no joy.

Then, as he was settling into his cosy chair near the fire on a cold wet winter's day, Harry received a knock on the door.

"Now who can at this late hour?" he asked himself. Rising from his chair, he answered the door and was surprised to find Mr O'Mara, the postal worker standing there in the threshold baring three manila envelopes in his hand. Harry accepted the envelopes and thanked the postal worker for delivering them. This warmed his heart on a winter's night.

His blood ran through his veins, pumping warmly into his heart and began to beat again like a wild exotic bird. This was the decisive moment...this was his chance for success. He was giddy as a scholar on the Eve of graduation.

He took a goblet and his Chardonnay and poured the drink into his empty goblet. Before sitting down in his chair to open the envelopes, he paused, meditated about his success as an author, swirled his glass in mid air and drank to his success. His fingers rattled as he tore open one of the envelopes. He glanced at the pink page printed in black Sans Serif font. He read:

Dear Mr Rodgers, We regret to inform you that your manuscript ***Adelle*** was not considered for publication. The editors at Grutton and

Grutton, Inc thought the material to be too racy and controversial for publication. We wish you success in your literary career.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs Sally Eggleston

Harry sunk in his chair, crestfallen. *How dare they trash his novel, his baby like that? They thought the material is too racy and controversial.* He said aloud. *I made Adelle into a heroine. Every African American will identify with **Adelle**. How can these bastards murder his heroine like that...stifling **Adelle** before she even breathed life into her lungs?*

Harry tore through the other two envelopes. To his disdain, each publishing house refused to publish his manuscript. "Bastards!" he breathed as he gulped down the last dregs of Chardonnay. Angrily he threw the manuscripts against a wall. The pages all scattered about in a cacophony of leaves.

He had a good mind to rip his novel to shreds. How dare some snobbish little Editor with half moon glasses refuse to publish his Novel? Was his Novel no good? He considered himself a good writer. He used action verbs, used perfect grammar, and created well-rounded characters.

"*There must be a decent publisher out there who considers publishing Adelle." Harry said out loud.*

He leaved through the pile of publishing houses again. Then he came across this little publishing house on Sacred Oaks. The name sounded promising and their criteria for submission did not seem so daunting. Harry thought he should try *Sampson & Sons*. With great pride, he placed the manuscript inside a manila envelope and penned an impressive cover letter with a short bio and the description of his work. He carefully wrote the name and address of the publishing house on the front of the manila envelope. It was time to mail the manuscript.

Winter turned to spring and Harry was busy preparing meals and running errands. He did not give any thought to his manuscript. He laid it to rest deep within his drawer somewhere out of his mind. He could not bear the thought of another rejection letter. It tore his heart to shreds thinking about his poor unpublished novel...murdered before it even got a chance to live. He shook his head in disbelief. Then, one day, as he was preparing a cool salad for his afternoon meal, the telephone rang.

"Hello," Harry said. "With whom do I have the pleasure of speaking to?"

"Mr Rodgers?" echoed a woman with a Scottish accent. "This is Ms Anderson-Mackenzie Larrouse from Sampson & Sons Publishers. I am phoning to tell you that your novel, ***Adelle***, has been considered for publication."

Harry stood there with his teeth gritting against each other. He suddenly did not feel hungry anymore. His stomach churned.

"Thank you, Ms Anderson. This is the fourth rejection notice I have received within months of each other!" said Harry.

He was about to hang up when Ms Anderson spoke again. When she finished speaking Harry's heart leapt within his chest. Sampson & Sons had accepted his manuscript. They wanted him to sign a contract. Harry was overwhelmed.

"Thank you, Ms Anderson.... May I say, that is the sexiest accent I have ever heard! Is it Scottish?" he asked.

Chloe blushed and said, "Yes it is, Mr Rodgers. I am half-Scottish. My Mum was born in Aberdeen and my father was born in France. Now, Mr Rodgers, when can you come in and sign your contract?"

Harry danced on air. He felt all light headed and dizzy. He thought he was about to faint. The clock on his wall said twelve O'clock. Harry's world stood still that very moment. That was the moment Sampson & Sons breathed life into his beloved ***Adelle***.

“Can I come in tomorrow, Ms Anderson?” asked Harry. He asked, dancing in his kitchen. Ms Anderson glanced at her boss’s diary and pencilled in a time slot for Mr Rodgers to meet Mr Henderson, Editor-in-Chief of *Sampson & Sons*.

“Will ten O’clock be convenient for you, Mr Rodgers?” asked Ms Anderson.

Harry breathed into the receiver a little drunk. “That sounds perfect, Ms Anderson. I cannot wait to meet and kiss you.”

Ms Anderson blushed and glanced at her boss. “It is not me, but Mr Henderson you have to impress.” she said. Chloe congratulated Harry again and put the receiver down. When the conversation ended, she walked over to her boss and showed her his diary.

“You have an appointment with Mr Rodgers tomorrow at ten O’clock, Mr Henderson, to discuss Mr Rodger’s contract.” she said as she walked over to fix her boss a cup of coffee.

Mr Henderson accepted the cup of coffee and smiled at Chloe. “I’d love to meet the author of ***Adelle***. Chloe, My dear...I think this could be a best-seller!” Chloe smiled at her boss and then quietly left the room.

Harry was ecstatic when he got off the phone with Ms Anderson-Mackenzie Larrouse. He quickly ate his lunch and headed towards the wardrobe to put together a three-piece suit for his ten O’clock meeting with Mr Henderson. His hands shook with excitement. What tie should he wear with his Pierre Cardin suit? He chose the one with the books. This, he thought, would be appropriate.

After a nice bath, he walked into the study. His writing desk was neat and tidy. He had not written anything else since writing ***Adelle.*** He was pissed off with all the amounts of rejection notices he had received these past few months that it put him off his writing.

Diligently he removed his key from the upper drawer and bent over to open his bottom drawer. He carefully unearthed the original manuscript of ***Adelle*** from its burial ground in the bottom of his writing desk and kissed it.

Success came quickly after publication. He received a handsome cheque for $300,000 from Sampson & Sons in royalty money from the sale of his novel. ***Adelle*** was at the top of the charts on the New York Times bestseller list for eighteen consecutive weeks. After this overnight success, there came talk shows and interviews on many talk shows around the country.

Many young girls read ***Adelle*** and admired the courage of the heroine who met Harriet Tubman in her struggle for freedom from slavery, in one of the South's cotton plantations.

The book encouraged young adults to read about Harriet Tubman and about the slavery in America and Europe. He had received several threats as well from prejudiced political activists who threatened to boycott the book and burn the book for its pro-African American themes.

He wrote the book, after all, during the Civil Right Movement in the 1960's when the country was in upheaval. Harry thought he had to publish it. The book, ***Adelle*** must fight against all prejudice and win the fight against racism in America and the world at large.

Harry signed a contract with Sampson & Sons to write a sequel to ***Adelle.*** They paid him a handsome quarter of a million dollars in advance to write the sequel. Harry had a tight deadline. He had until the summer of 1966 to write the sequel. The title of the sequel came easy to him. He would call the sequel, '***A Woman of Class'***. The story would begin from the moment that Confederate Army soldier, Henry Smyth was out of jail and married Adelle.

Henry Smyth served five years in jail for failing to adhere to orders given to him by his superiors to abandon and turn over Adelle, a 'negro' woman, the daughter of a slave to her master. **A Woman of Class** told the story about how Adelle Smyth, now married to a Confederate officer,

fought for freedom against slavery with the help of Harriet Tubman and carved a name for herself.

The ideas for ***A Woman of Class*** were easy enough...yet when it came to put pen to paper, Harry was lost for words.

For weeks, he sat at his desk attempting to write the first sentence, but failed. He stared down upon the blank page with sweat pouring down from his forehead mingling with the metallic ink from his pen. Harry wracked his brains and wiped his forehead with a clean handkerchief then looked up at the portrait of the Muse Calliope hanging from the wall above his writing desk. He prayed to her for inspiration, but the Muse remained silent. He tapped his pen against the wooden desk, hummed a few tunes to himself, poured himself goblets of Chardonnay, but nothing came to him as he sat there attempting to draft the first sentence to ***A Woman of Class.***

The nights dragged on and at the end of his wits, Harry sat there trying to come up with an opening statement to mark the empty page. It was ridiculous! He, a renowned author stymied by the silence of the Muse.

"Come on, Calliope, Darling talk to me! Inspire me with your musings!" Yet nothing came to him. Staring at his blank page, he pulled on his earlobes, massaging them for inspiration...nothing!

"Great...what am I going to say to Mr Henderson when I have nothing to show him?" he muttered to himself.

In a few weeks' time, he had a meeting at *Sampson & Sons* with his Editor and he had no story for him. Mr Henderson would sue him for breach of contract and his writing career would be over in a blink of an eye.

Exasperated he brushed his hair back and prayed to his favourite muse to speak to him. "For the love of God, inspire me, Oh Calliope!" Then he took out his poetry pad, which he kept in a special drawer, and he let his pen glide through an empty page. It took him an hour to produce a poem.

The Poet

Like Shakespeare,

The Poet writes his poem,

With a steady hand round his yellow quill.

Dreaming sensual dreams, his soul yells

Speaking wisdom with bodacious words he

Fills blank pages into books-- pen in ink well;

He burns the midnight oil as he writes—

A radical young rebel with new ideas,

Staring out the window his fancy takes flight

Like a dozen butterflies in velvet skies;

His heart skips with each rhyme and rhythm

From his quill as his words glide across the page

His words paint a multi-coloured scene like a prism

Reflecting his heart with the sagaciousness of a sage;

Projecting love, hate, compassion with each stroke

Like an artisan he knits and weaves his words;

Playing with the ancient language, he spoke

Not with tongue but with words to be heard

Not by the ear, but with the eyes;

The author, connives and schemes all day

Knitting his brows, he opens up his mind

And listens carefully to the Muses' symphony;

Then inspiration comes like the minnow.

Spinning tales of love between a man and a woman,

Making love in a small yellow dingy out at sea;

The poet weaves each story with a crafty hand

Into these lacy tapestries, he calls Poetry;

Like Shakespeare, taking pen to paper,

The poet sits by the window near his lamp;

And dreams of being a famous author;

His name engraved upon his book like a stamp.

Harry put down his pen. Why could he not write a single sentence *to* **A Woman of Class** and yet write this stunning poem? It did not make sense, did it? He got up from his writing chair, stretched himself and walked into the kitchen to pour himself a cup of coffee. Morning dawned and he did not get a drop of sleep. He grew tired from exhaustion.

How long had it been since he slept, eight days...a week? Surely, this was not healthy. He had to sleep and he had to produce a new manuscript. He put his head on his pillow and let his mind wander until he drifted into a peaceful dream.

Harry tossed and turned in his sleep. He dreamed of meeting Mr Henderson. In his dream, or nightmare, rather, he met with Mr Henderson. Mr Henderson asked how far he got with the sequel to ***Adelle***. Harry began to sweat profusely and played with his tie.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Mr Henderson," Harry began, "But I'm afraid that I cannot write anything...I have nothing to write about."

Mr Henderson's smile turned into a grimace and his demeanour changed abruptly.

"I will give you until noon tomorrow to produce a spanking new manuscript, Mr Rodgers...or we, at *Sampson & Sons* will sue your assets off for breach of contract." Mr Henderson said through gritted teeth. "Am I making myself clear, Mr. Rodgers?" said Mr Henderson.

Harry felt a tad sick. He sat in a puddle of sweat nervously untying his tie and looked at Mr Henderson in the eye.

"Yes, Sir, I understand quite clearly." Harry said.

Mr Henderson smiled at him and buzzed Chloe in to escort Harry out of the office. Harry returned to his flat that afternoon and began to write, but nothing came out; the page defiantly stared back at Harry...blank and empty.

Harry grabbed his pen and forced his hand to write. His hand shook and tried desperately to write, but no words formed. He looked up at Calliope who sat on a throne with her writing tablet laughing at Harry as he struggled to write. "Write, you bastard—write!" he told his hand. His right hand shook and then...it stabbed his left hand with the tip of the pen. Harry yelled in pain and exasperation.

He was going mad! At noon the next day, Harry felt sick. There he was...a famous author on the brink of a nervous breakdown with no manuscript to hand his Editor. He knew he was a dead man.

Mr Henderson looked at Harry and smiled. "Well, do you have something for me, Mr Rodgers?" he asked.

Harry could not look at Mr Henderson in the eye. "No, Sir...I'm so sorry. I don't know how to tell you this...I have no manuscript for you." Mr Anderson rose from his seat. He pulled a revolver on Harry. Harry shook with fear.

"I told you, Mr Rodgers...you have signed a contract with *Sampson & Sons*...a legal and binding contract. I warned you that if you did not produce a manuscript by Tuesday, 31 August, we would sue you for every

penny you got. However, I am going to cut a deal with you, Mr Rodgers...I will be nice and hold you captive here until you write that manuscript. You will write that manuscript or I will kill you! Now, write, you dog...write."

Mr Henderson pointed the revolver to Harry's head. Harry sat in Mr Henderson's desk and began writing. Mr Henderson buzzed Chloe who came in with her pad and pencil.

"Yes, Mr Henderson?" asked Chloe. Mr Henderson stood with his revolver still pointed towards Harry, never taking his eyes off him, instructed his secretary to bring him in two cups of coffee and pastrami on rye sandwich for Harry.

"Mr Henderson, why are you holding a revolver? What's this all about?" she asked.

Mr Henderson explained to his secretary how Harry was going to sit in his office writing all night until he produced the sequel to ***Adelle***.

"And Chloe, dear...don't say a word of this to anyone in the office. If you do, you'll be out of a job...got that?" Chloe nodded and a few minutes later, she walked out the door.

The office workers were finishing their reports and were about to put the covers on their typewriters when Chloe came back with a tray of coffee and the pastrami sandwich.

Bertha, one of the secretaries to Mr Scheilheimer, one of the chief editors at *Sampson & Sons*, smiled at Chloe and asked rather curiously.

"Is Mr Henderson going to stay all night with that young man? We saw him going into Mr Henderson's office and he is still there. It's six O'clock and he's not out yet."

Chloe smiled at Bertha and said that Mr Henderson and Mr Rodgers were having a rather long meeting.

Knocking at the door, Chloe entered and placed the tray on top of the filing cabinet. Mr Henderson was sitting on the brown leather sofa near his desk, revolver pointed at Harry's head. Harry was busy typing away while buckets of sweat poured down his cheeks.

The black leather chair was damp with sweat. Harry typed any key...he was not thinking about what to write. It was difficult to write having someone pointing a gun at you.

"Thank you, Chloe, you may sit down next to me and shut your mouth. We are going to sit and wait for this Bozo to finish his Manuscript." Mr Henderson pointed the gun at Chloe and beckoned her to sit down next to him on the brown leather couch.

The clock kept ticking into the night. The atmosphere was tense in that little office. Chloe sat and looked at poor Harry sitting there typing his life away while Mr Henderson pointed the Smith and Wesson at him. This was not what publishing was all about. It was about good writing and a mutual understanding between author and publisher.

Around nine O'clock, Harry stopped typing. Mr Henderson stood up and walked towards his desk. "You finish, Mr Rodgers?" he asked.

Harry could not move. He looked down at all the incoherent cacophony of words that he typed...and cried. He cried like a baby...pleading for a little comfort and kindness.

"Is this your idea of a joke?" growled Mr Henderson. "What the devil is this garbage?" he asked.

Chloe stood up and tried to plead with Mr Henderson. "Thomas, please!" she begged. "Can't you see how frightened he is?" She stood between Mr Henderson and Harry and cuddled Harry.

Mr Henderson pointed the gun towards the two of them.

"No...He promised me a manuscript and he is going to deliver! I told him he had until nine O'clock to finish the manuscript." He looked at the

clock on the wall.

"It's nine O'clock and he still hasn't produced a manuscript except this garbage. Now, I am going to finish him and anyone who steps in the way." A shot went off and a flock of birds sitting on the ledge flew off.

Harry sat in bed, his face all covered with sweat. His heart went on over-drive. What happened? Was he dead? Was he in heaven? He looked about and found himself in his room. It was three O'clock in the afternoon. He must have dozed off at seven that morning and he had a hell of a nightmare. The phone went and Harry shot out of bed, surprised by the sound of the ringing phone. He was out of breath when he answered it.

"Hello," he said. It was Chloe.

"Mr Rodgers, Mr Henderson would like to meet with you to discuss your progress. Would eight O'clock next Thursday morning be convenient for you?" Harry's heart raced faster.

"Yes, that'll be good." He lied.

Chloe pencilled the date into Mr Henderson's diary. "Ok, Mr Rodgers...we'll see you next Thursday."

Before he hung up, he blew Chloe a kiss. Harry hurried to his writing desk. In a panic, he grabbed his pen and praying to his favourite muse with all his might, he asked the muse to inspire him. To his surprise, his pen rolled and glided upon page after page of prose.

"Oh, thank you mighty Calliope...I knew you wouldn't be silent forever! Thanks for saving my hide!"

By the end of summer, ***A Woman of Class*** was finished. Mr Henderson was pleased and delighted with the manuscript. The book was a masterpiece rolling off the shelves at the drop of a hat. Harry became a well-known writer. *Sampson & Sons Publishing Company* became a big name in the publishing industry with dozens of well-established authors.

"Shall we open another bottle of bubbly?" asked Harry as he opened his first proof of his latest novel.

“Yes, Harry...this calls for a celebration!” said Chloe as she kissed Harry. Harry opened the bottle of Chardonnay, poured two goblets of the bubby, and handed one to Chloe. Together they clinked glasses and toasted to Harry’s success.

Haunted Pathway

I have heard of houses accruing eerie vibrations and absorbing negative vibes from ghostly inhabitants. I often scoffed when I read ***The Amityville Horror*** and saw the movie by that name. I put it down to bad writing and corny cinematography. Yes, I was a sceptic in my teenage years, laughing about the idea of haunted houses. I have seen too many films about the subject– ***House***, the ***Hearse***, ***The Haunting***, and ***Poltergeist*** —I laughed at the whole lot.

My late uncle, Horace, estranged from my father, passed away a year ago. Uncle Horace was one of those eccentrics who lived a hermit's life. At the age of nine, he had the crazy notion that he discovered another dimension. My father thought he was Looney.

Uncle Horace insisted he saw a glimpse of the afterlife one night as he got up to have a drink of water. He walked past the living room with his glass of water gripped tightly in his hand when he froze dead in his tract. An eerie light ascended from the cellar...a greenish, fluorescent glow...like a strange will-O-wisp over the Irish marshes.

Uncle Horace let his glass drop, the sound of broken shards hitting the floor as the cold liquid flooded his feet. A ghostly vapour filled the room. Horace stood there, his veins frozen with fear as the icy vapours engulfed him.

Outside, an amber moon poked its fat face against the alabaster-coloured windowpane; beams of moonlight danced around the room. The wraith-like vapours seemed to whisper in the boy's ear, beckoning him

down the cellar. Horace, in a trance, followed hesitantly. He opened the cellar door and reluctantly descended the staircase.

"Who's there?" Uncle Horace asked. There was no answer. Horace saw the vapour and eerie light before him; leading him forward towards the brick wall...it suddenly disappeared through the cracks.

"Who's there?" Horace cried again. This time he heard knocking coming from inside the brick wall. Horace tapped the wall. It was as solid. The tapping continued. Horace turned around, trying to go back upstairs and into his cosy bed; but as he turned his heels, something breathed down his neck. Scared shitless, Horace turned slowly around. There was nothing there.

Seconds later, the tapping commenced. Curious, Horace tapped back. Were there rats trapped inside the wall? Determined to find the underlying cause of the mysterious tapping, Horace found an axe propped against one side of the basement. He was about to lift the heavy axe to whack the wall down when, to his horror, the wall began to mysteriously bleed.

"Sod, this!" said Horace as he turned his heels to go; but just then the fluorescent light penetrated the room and the wraith-like vapours called out his name.

"Horace...Horace...open the door." It said.

"Who said that?" Horace screamed, spooked out of his wits.

“Horace, knock three times upon the brick wall.” The wraith-like voice whispered in his ear.

Horace knocked three times against the brick wall. This time a hidden door opened, revealing a hidden passageway. Horace was too stunned and horrified to believe it. Horace walked through the hidden corridor. It was pitch black but the eerie light illuminated the way.

“Where is this leading?” asked Horace.

“You’ll soon see.” echoed the eerie vapours.

Horace went a few flights down a narrow spiralled staircase. There was a stench of death and decay, which almost made him puke. Horace reached the bottom of the staircase, which led to an alleyway. The door screeched as he opened it. Beyond the door was a graveyard...a godforsaken graveyard with crooked tombstones and stone crosses. Horace’s heart raced against his chest like a trapped bird begging for freedom. A few tombstones down, Horace saw it...a human skull, its cranium split open. Horace let out a blood-curdling scream.

“What the...?” he yelled. However, there was no one there to hear him.

Horace felt a presence near him...a ghostly presence breathing down his neck. As Horace turned around, he saw two black eyes...black as ebony staring at him.

“Who are you?” Horace asked. However, the eyes did not answer. Instead, it stared at him incessantly for the space of a few minutes.

It was the figure of a little black girl shabbily dressed in rags, a black woollen shawl wrapped tightly against her shoulders. The ghostly figure

clutched Horace's hands tightly, beckoning him to follow her. Horace felt the coldness of her bony fingers. It sent a chill down the length of his spine. The figure led him towards a little white church. Horace entered the church with trepidation.

Inside, Horace walked along the deserted aisle. The church was completely empty. Horace walked along the knave wondering why this little black girl brought him here. On one side of the Altar was a dusty organ. The dust and cobwebs of a hundred years caked the instrument, telling Horace that it had been centuries before it played. Up in the ceiling Horace saw a chandelier dimly lit by white tapers. The chandelier, too, caked in layers of cobwebs.

The little girl sat on one of the wooden pews and inclined her head as if in prayer. Suddenly the organ came to life playing a solemn dirge. Spooked, Uncle Horace rose and ran as fast as his feet could carry him. He ran out of the church and was about to turn in the direction from whence he came, when he heard the clopping of horse hooves behind him. A booming voice penetrated the gloom, sending electrifying vibrations up and down Horace's spine. Reluctantly Horace turned to face his adversary.

Riding on a black steed and hurling a steel sword, was a confederate soldier. He was pointing at someone accusingly. Plunging his whip against his horse's flesh, he gained speed. Horace ran for dear life. The black steed, gaining momentum with each flick of the whip, until it almost caught up with Horace.

"Ye mongrel...ye cannot escape justice! Where is the slave?" the rider yelled in a booming, sinister voice. Horace hid behind a sycamore tree, his forehead glistening with beads of sweat; his heart pumping against his chest.

“I shall find the wretched slave,” continued the soldier, “I shall drag her lifeless body through the mud back to her master where she belongs...the filthy swine!”

Perched up on the tree, an owl began to hoot. Horace could hear the sound of the horse’s hooves nearer. In a cold sweat, he stepped upon a branch. It cracked against his feet and the horse and rider dashed forward in the noise’s direction.

Horace leapt and ran as fast as he could like lightning, trying to get away from his adversary, but as he got further away, he lost his footing and tumbled as he fell across a steep hill. He rolled down the hill like tumbleweed, bruising himself in the process and landed head first in a canal.

Holding his breath, Horace dunked himself under the murky waters trying to pretend he had drowned. Horace breathed through a tall reed, which he had broken off from the canal’s bank. A few feet away, the slave catcher looked left and right, trying to find him to no avail.

Defeated, the rider plunged his heels against the animal, which kicked its head back in pain and rode un-triumphantly into the night.

Horace poked his head above the water and saw, to his delight that the rider had retreated. Swimming towards the bank, he crawled to safety. He was about to find the hidden passageway when he heard a scream. It was the scream of a little girl in distress. A few distance away, he saw the rider crouched against some bushes, his breeches round his ankles. He was moving like an animal, pouncing on its prey. The screams of the little girl echoed through the silence as the fiend, in a drunken rage, plunged his filthy body into her repeatedly. The little girl dug her fingernails into the dirt but the beast was too powerful for her.

The girl squirmed underneath his mass. Somehow, she managed to crawl from under him. Screaming she limped into the night. The rider pursued her. Out in the distance the girl saw a shimmering light and then the house. She frantically rapped against the door begging for help against her attacker. She knocked three times, hoping that someone on the other side might help her... but no one opened the door.

Her attacker grabbed her by the hair, dragging the girl across the muddy path. The girl screamed in agony as her attacker dragged her fifty feet from the brick house.

Taking out his whip, he lashed out at her; the girl fell to the ground screaming in agony. The whip cracked repeatedly against her rib cage as blood oozed out the poor girl's flesh. With one fell swoop, he tore her dress. Like a savage animal, he mounted her. Kicking and screaming, the girl tried again to escape, but the beast kept on torturing the poor girl. The girl tried to bite him but the beast hit her with his angry paws. The girl went limp as the beast continued his rampage.

His fists hit her helpless face repeatedly, crushing her skull against a rock as blood gushed out. The fiend took his lance and savagely gouged her eyes out. Horace felt physically sick. He found himself vomiting with disgust. The beast dragged her lifeless carcass through the mud, tied its feet to the saddle and dragged the body away.

In horror, Horace ran looking for the passageway that brought him to this strange place. Walking on and on, he saw a bright light flashing from the observatory. The mysterious light, shone brightly as if it were a beacon guiding him through the darkness. Horace followed the light. Frantic to get back to the safety of his own room he knocked on the door. Soon the door opened and Horace ran inside.

Horace was never his true self again after this. He kept in his room and neither wanted to go to school or go down the basement. His parents began to worry about him.

He grew distant and aloof. Slowly, ever so slowly, he began to go mad. He was convinced that the house held some sort of evil karma...that the walls kept thumping.

On his way to the bathroom, he thought he saw a strange shimmering light coming from the door leading to the observatory. What's more, he developed an obsession to the Civil War. He begged my father to visit the library for him and borrow books about the Civil War. My father refused at first saying that he was not his servant. He encouraged Horace to get out of the house, but Horace refused to budge out of his room. Horace was convinced that the house was some sort of burial ground for lost slaves captured and killed before they could come to freedom.

My father argued with Horace, trying to convince him to stop this nonsense. Horace and Herbert Holding fought. My father called Horace a mental case and Horace punched him. He knocked my father's tooth out. After that, the two brothers never spoke to each other.

When my grandparents died, my grandfather left Horace, who was the eldest, the house. However, my estranged uncle did not want it. He did not want anything to do with the house. He moved out of the house on his eighteenth birthday and went to live in Florida Everglades for a while, living the Hermit's life. My father lived alone in the house until he married in his late twenties. At first, he marvelled at the prospect of having a home of his own. Then, after living alone for a while, his mind began to wonder; he would lie in bed looking at the walls and thinking about the memories that once ran through the empty house.

My father began to hear strange noises coming from inside the walls...thumping noises. He also began to hear ghostly noises coming from the cellar and to his horror one night, as he came home late after a night out in the town; he looked up and saw a shimmering light flickering from the observatory window. *Was there an intruder in the house? He thought.*

Shaking like a leaf, he fumbled with the keys. *He ran inside and turned on the lights.*

"Is anyone there?" my father asked. There was no answer.

He ran up the stairs and opened the door leading towards the observatory. Climbing up the spiral stairs, he thought he heard footsteps behind him.

There was no one there. He opened the door and looked inside. The observatory was pitching black. Lighting a match, my father lit a candle that he found on top of one of a side tables.

"Is anyone there?" my father asked again. No one answered.

My father inspected every nook and cranny of the observatory. He saw thousands of artefacts strewn about the place...trinkets from the early seventeenth century...an ivory, bird age caked in cobwebs, was propped against the window.

There were seventeenth century attire, too; clothing worn in colonial America. What were all these articles doing up in the attic? Had Horace, in his madness, put them there to taunt him? Half of these costumes were not warn since the seventeenth century. The clothes and heirlooms, all covered in soot and cobwebs.

My father wrote to his brother asking for his permission to sell the house, but he never got a reply back. My father could not sell the house for Horace was the owner and held the deeds to the house. In his later years, Horace drew up a Will and bequeathed the house to his brother, Herbert.

They found my father's body in that house. He had called an estate agent to sell the house. After my uncle's death, my father felt no desire to move into this house. The house, a two –storey building in the heart of Jersey City, with a detached observatory, was now on the market. A year went by without anyone putting in an interest; my father began to lose sleep over this.

“I’m sorry, Mr Holding,” the estate agent told my father, “But nobody has put in an offer for the property.”

In a rage, my father grabbed the estate agent by the scruff of his neck and threw him against the wall.

“Now, listen...you get this house sold or else, I’ll...,”my father threatened. He let go of the estate agent who shook with fear.

Another year passed but still no offers. My father decided to take it off the market. My father went mad. He tossed and turned in his sleep, threatening to burn the house down. I have never seen my father in such a state in my life. It was as if he had gone completely mad. My mother threatened to divorce him. My mother, once a very tolerating, loving and devoted woman, left my father and me eight months later.

The police found my father’s body in the cellar of the house. His eyes were wide open as if being terrorized by something sinister and his mouth, wide open.

I gasped as I heard my father’s solicitor read out my father’s last will and testament. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up.

“To my son, Gordon Holding, I leave the sum of £250,000 and my estate...on one condition; you must destroy the house on Clifton Street...the very house that brought my relationship with my older brother, Horace, to a bitter end. The house is evil and must be destroyed.”

Being a sceptic, and a curious one at that, I thought I would try living in this house. What evil karma can lurk inside an old house? I owed my father the benefit of the doubt.

Having just moved in, I was about to spend my first night at Clifton Street on my own. A bit of a draft travelled through the empty corridors.

At first, I paid no attention to it and settled down to sleep, throwing the covers over my head. The clock stroke one when a florescent light and a small, wail brought me out of a deep slumber.

I tried ignoring it rationalizing that it might be a figment of my imagination or perhaps my digestion playing havoc with my stomach, but I sat up in bed as I heard a noise.

Boom! Boom! Boom! I thought I was going mad. I rose, wrapping my robe around me and followed the noise. The corridor was empty and the house dark and eerie.

The floorboards squeaked with each step I took. Boom! Boom! Boom! The noise continued. I turned the light but there was no one there. The noise was coming from inside the walls! Boom, Boom! Boom! I climbed the stairs to the attic, a florescent light shone through the cracks of the wooden door. Just then, the clocks began to chime in unison. Placing my hands against my ears, I thought I would go mad.

Suddenly silence; all was silent throughout the house once more. I went back to bed and dreamed a perturbed dream.

I paid a visit to the public library the next day. The librarian, a burly woman with a bouffant hairdo and a husky voice sat at the reference section. She was reading a journal when I walked in.

“Hello, can I help you?” she asked.

I introduced myself and asked if there were any information about the house on Clifton Street. The librarian gave me some microfiche to look through.

I searched through the microfiche. There were several articles written about the house. The house, built in the 1800, was a safe house during the Civil War. A church nearby served as a sanctuary for runaway slaves who sought haven in the North.

Many slaves found the path to freedom, but others were not so lucky; many slaves, being so close to freedom, met their doom, for the slave catcher apprehended them, bringing them back South to face justice—or even death.

The observatory in the house on Clifton Street was a beacon to welcome weary runaway slaves. A lantern lit the way towards freedom. I thanked the librarian and returned home.

That night, as I lay in bed, waiting for sleep to invade my body, the sound of the wind awakened me.

To my horror, I discovered that the window was open. I thought I had closed it when I went to bed. Running towards the window, I closed it. There was a chill in the room. Shivering, I returned to bed and was about to cover myself under the quilt when the walls began to rattle.

Boom! Boom! Boom! I covered my head with the quilt, trying desperately not to panic. I peaked from under the quilt and saw the walls rattling and the floorboards thumping as if a million people were knocking and banging inside the walls and underneath the floorboards.

"Silence!" I yelled. The knocking and banging continued. I jumped out of bed, pulling my hair out like a lunatic. I ran down the stairs and out the front door.

A full moon illuminated the October sky. I looked about but the streets were empty. Shivering, I stood there, hands clutched around myself, trying to make sense of all this madness. I looked up and saw a lantern lit in the window of the observatory, its flames, like a florescent beacon shining down on me.

Taking a deep breath, I opened the front door of the house and walked inside. The house shimmered with this eerie florescent glow. From the

cellar, a voice summoned me, followed by more tapping.

In a trance, I followed the voice. The walls, bursting at the seams, echoed with the sound of knocking. I followed the light and it lead to a hidden passageway. My heart froze as I followed the path and found, to my horror, dozens of skulls in a ditch.

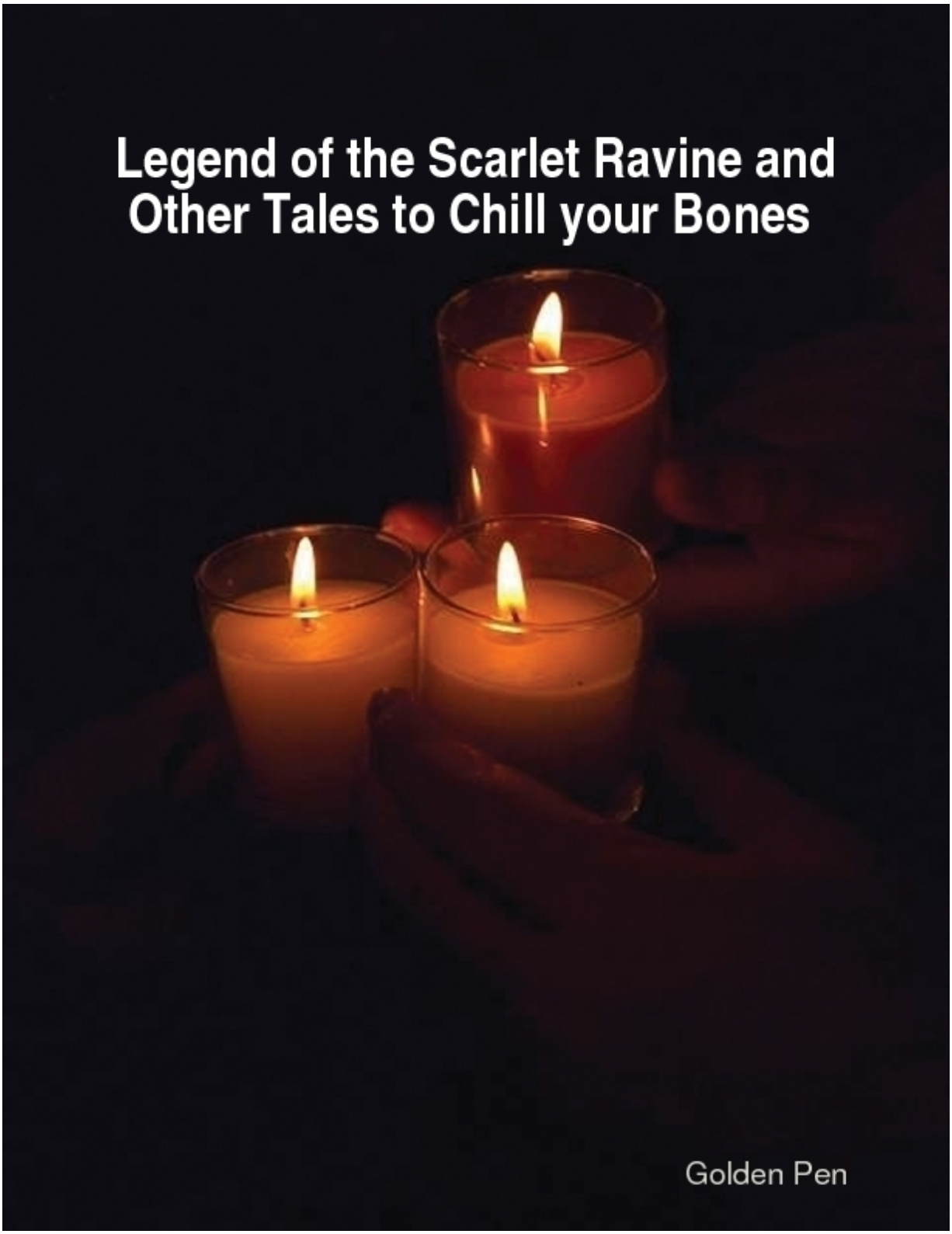
I ran back into the cellar and up the stairs to the observatory. In the middle of the bay windows, the lantern glowed, like a bonfire. I stood wondering what ghostly apparition lit this lantern. Like a lunatic, I screamed. Holding the lantern above my head, I smashed it against the floor. The lantern broke in a thousand pieces, the flames engulfing me.

The fire spread throughout the room, catching the drapes and surrounding walls. The madness was now over. True to my father's wishes, I destroyed the house on Clifton Street.

The fire blazed for over a day as fire fighters battled the flames. They found my body, badly burnt in the attic. I was barely alive, but screaming in terror. Some houses truly acquire karma. I attest to that.

What transpired in this house was purely evil. It destroyed three lives, that of my uncle, my father, and I. I will never be the same again. Laying in this psychiatric hospital, a monster, I scream in pain and agony, as the doctors redress my bandages, my life is truly over.

Legend of the Scarlet Ravine and Other Tales to Chill your Bones



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